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RUEHZU/ASIAN PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 004218

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: MOFA ON OPPOSITION CRACKDOWN IN BURMA

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators and the opposition "does not necessarily signal a return to large-scale armed violence or an increased military threat," according to Japanese Foreign Ministry officials. Japan, at this point, has no plans for public statements criticizing the Burmese regime, but MOFA officials admit that if the violence escalates, it will be difficult to maintain support for "dialogue" with Burma's rulers. Japan appreciates U.S. efforts to consult with Japan on Burma, but maintains its policy of engagement and dialogue will not change. MOFA officials say UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari should visit Burma soon, but doubt he could "bring about immediate results." End Summary.

¶2. (C) Japan is closely watching the Burmese regime's recent arrests and beatings of protesters and pro-democracy activists in Burma, and is deeply concerned about the violence and human rights abuses, MOFA First Southeast Asia Division Principal Deputy Director Atsushi Kuwabara told Embassy Tokyo Political Officer on September 7. The uptick in arrests, however, does not necessarily signal an increased military threat or a return to large-scale armed violence. It is too early to tell if this is the start of long-term deterioration in Burma, and we must monitor the situation closely, Kuwabara said. MOFA is not planning to issue a press statement at this time, but will continue to watch the situation closely. Turning to the September 5 clash between monks and local government officials, Japan is concerned about rumors that local military or government officials fired warning shots at the monks, Kuwabara noted. A shooting would quickly escalate violence, agreed Kuwabara and MOFA First Southeast Asia Division officer Nambu.

¶3. (C) It would be very beneficial for Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari to visit Burma to convey the UN concerns and to facilitate dialogue between the regime and members of the democracy movement and ethnic minority groups, Kuwabara and Nambu stated. Tokyo does not think Gambari would be able to bring about immediate visible results, but it would be an important first step in a long process. Gambari would be able to engage in direct dialogue between Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi, Kuwabara emphasized.

¶4. (C) It is important to take a comprehensive foreign policy approach to Burma, Nambu asserted. In addition to promoting human rights and democratization, we must not neglect economic development and humanitarian aid when formulating our foreign policy strategy on Burma. For example, Japan is increasingly concerned about growing economic disparity there. The economic situation is deteriorating rapidly due to inflation, especially in border areas, and humanitarian aid needs to be an important part of our Burma policy. The

international community needs to lift restrictions and make it easier for humanitarian aid organizations to operate in Burma, Nambu emphasized. Increased violence and a continued crackdown on peace activists will make it more difficult to maintain international support for dialogue with Burma. It is important for the international community not to isolate Burma because this will bring Burma and China closer together and make it more difficult to accomplish our shared goals, cautioned Kuwabara and Nambu.

¶15. (C) Kuwabara asked Embassy Tokyo Political Officer if the United States meeting with the Burmese Government in Beijing was a one-time occurrence, or if it was a policy shift that marked the beginning of on-going direct dialogue between the United States and Burmese Government. It is very important for the United States and Japan to consult closely with each other regarding our approaches for achieving our shared goals, Kuwabara and Nambu emphasized.

¶16. (C) Comment: On a number of occasions, these and other MOFA interlocutors have raised the June meeting in Beijing and asked why the United States did not seek Tokyo's assistance in facilitating the meeting. In light of our interlocutors' desire to consult with us and play a positive role, it would be useful to take the Japanese up on their offer to consult and cooperate to address the ongoing crackdown. End Comment.

Schieffer